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TESTIMONY
Of
William Smith, Jr.
Fraternal Order of Police
on
“Dangers of Synthetic Drugs”

Before the
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, and
Investigations

— BUILDING ON A PROUD TRADITION —

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and the distinguished members of the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, and Investigations. I would like to thank Chairman Sensenbrenner for inviting the FOP to share the views of the 330,000 members of the Fraternal Order of Police on synthetic drugs, and I would like to thank Chuck Canterbury, National President, for asking me to represent the FOP.

Before I begin my remarks, I would like to thank Representative Dent for introducing H.R. 3537, the “Synthetic Drug Control Act,” and Representative Katko for introducing H.R. 4229, the “Protecting Our Youth from Dangerous Synthetic Drugs Act.” I would also like to thank the Chairman for his support on the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant. We are very grateful.

The abuse of synthetic drugs has become a major problem with increased reports from every region of the country indicating that individuals are committing violent acts while under the influence of these drugs. Many of these drugs induce elevated heart rates, increased blood pressure, and higher body temperature. They can also trigger seizures, hallucinations, and highly agitated states which make them very dangerous not just to the user but also for those around them, including Law Enforcement and other first

responders, who respond to the aid of individuals under the influence of these synthetic drugs. The side effects of synthetic drugs are very similar to another drug which law enforcement officers encounter, Phencyclidine (PCP). As the Committee can see I am not a small officer and have dealt with individuals both under the influence of synthetic drugs and PCP. Let it be known, even at my stature, at times, has been difficult for myself and other officers to restrain those individuals. Individuals under the influence of these substances have an almost supernatural strength and increased pain tolerance which can lead to officers and other first responders being injured when dealing with individuals.

According to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Poison Control has seen a 229% spike in calls in relation to synthetic drugs. Hundreds of these synthetic drugs are manufactured overseas in China and Mexico with no regulation or medical purpose. There have also been reports of 49,000 new chemicals used in these synthetic drugs. This is costing children and teenagers their lives. Also, these synthetics are designed to keep law enforcement from finding the origin of the chemicals. The DEA testified this past fall in front of House Energy and Commerce Committee that they are “three steps behind” the criminals when it comes to synthetics and analogues.

In the past few years synthetic marijuana has become the popular choice of synthetic drugs. It is designed to mimic the effects of organic marijuana and has a wide commercial availability. It can be bought at local stores for \$5, which has made it popular among young people and the homeless. That is because it is sold with interesting brand names such as Bizarro, K2, Spice, and Scooby Snax. These synthetic drugs are usually manufactured in foreign facilities, like China and Mexico, with an ever changing cocktail of chemicals. While all 50 states have outlawed synthetic drugs in some way, the problem is the ever changing chemical makeup. The manufacturers of these synthetics keep changing the chemical makeup of the drugs trying to skirt the laws and claim that their products aren't technically illegal.

Synthetic marijuana has 2-5 times the amount of THC in it than normal marijuana. The availability and high use of this drug in recent years has led to a 1400% increase in hospital visits from 2009-2012. Commissioner William Bratton of the City of New York Police Department said, "This is a scourge on our society, affecting the most disadvantaged neighborhoods and our most challenged citizens. It affects teenagers in public housing, homeless in the city shelter system, and it's quite literally flooding our streets."

In the previous session of Congress, the FOP supported legislation to add synthetic marijuana, bath salts, and other synthetic drugs to the DEA's Schedules of controlled substances, but the chemical manufacturers have found loopholes for manufacturing and distribution of these drugs or "analogue" drugs- because they are similar, but not chemically identical to the scheduled substances. With the loopholes these manufacturers, distributors, and sellers and abusers of these synthetic substances all know exactly what to do with them- ingest them or snort them to get a dangerous and unpredictable high.

In the past few years we have seen an even more dangerous new synthetic drug ravage our streets. This new drug is synthetic fentanyl. Used by doctors, fentanyl is the most powerful opioid in medicine. However, according to the DEA, much of what is being found on the streets is not diverted from hospitals but rather sourced from China and Mexico. Frequently, people buy it on the street with no idea that it is fentanyl.

It is reported to be between 100-200% stronger than heroin. Just a quarter of a milligram — 0.25 milligrams — can kill you. For a sense of just how little that is, a typical baby aspirin tablet is 81 mg.

If you cut that tablet into 324 pieces, one of those pieces would be equal to a quarter-milligram.

The week of April 4th saw 10 people die from drug overdoses that were caused by synthetic fentanyl. Several states have reported a surge in deaths caused by fentanyl. It is estimated that two thirds of the 420 overdose deaths in New Hampshire can be attributed to this synthetic drug. The vast majority of fentanyl use is attributed to heroin where it is used as a cutting agent to increase potency.

This year in California fentanyl was passed off as the prescription drug Norco and sold on the streets. In just one 10-day period, this batch was responsible for at least 10 deaths and 48 overdoses.

More than 80% of all fentanyl seizures in 2014 were concentrated in just 10 states: Ohio, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Maryland, New Jersey, Kentucky, Virginia, Florida, New Hampshire and Indiana.

In 2013, Ohio reported 92 fentanyl-related overdose deaths. The next year, there was a five-fold increase, with 514 deaths. In Maryland, the number of overdose deaths jumped from 58 in 2013 to 185 the next year.

The drug naloxone can reverse an opioid overdose. However, because fentanyl is so potent, it may require several doses of naloxone to bring someone out of a fentanyl overdose. That is why it is of particular concern when people don't know whether they are even using fentanyl have an overdose.

Law enforcement is in danger as well when dealing with synthetic fentanyl. The DEA stated that fentanyl is extremely dangerous even to law enforcement and anyone else who may come into contact with it, so the police tactics used to directly attack the drug trafficking networks producing and importing the drugs actually put the officers in danger when coming into contact with the substance, because it is so potent. In a video released by CNN, the DEA showed personal protective equipment (PPE) which police officers and DEA specialists need to use in order to handle the product without being exposed to health risks.

In the last few months an even more dangerous new synthetic drug from Canada has emerged with the street name W-18. W-18 was originally formulated and patented at the University of Alberta, Canada in 1984, the only testing of W-18 was on done on mice and no pharmaceutical company would touch it and the recipe sat on a shelf, until a Chinese chemist found it and he is believed to have

started manufacturing it in China and selling it online. W-18 resurfaced in Canada last fall. This drug is 10,000 times more powerful than morphine and 100 times more powerful than fentanyl. W-18 has already been found in Pennsylvania and Florida. In March, a man in Florida was found to have two and a half pounds of W-18 when he was arrested for selling fentanyl pills; unfortunately the individual was only charged for smuggling fentanyl, as W-18 is not yet an illegal scheduled narcotic.

Research currently does not know if the lifesaving drug Naloxone for overdoses even has an effect on a drug like this. W-18 also looks just like heroin and cannot be differentiated by the human eye. There is no test to determine if an individual has introduced W-18 into their body and we do not know if this drug can be attributed to the recent spike in overdose deaths.

In conclusion, the FOP is ready to work with the Committee on the issue of synthetic drugs. There are many areas on this issue on which I expect there to be broad agreement. This is a public health, and a public safety crisis that is destroying our communities across the country and needs to be acted upon now.

Thank you for having me here today and I am pleased to answer any questions you might have.